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ABSTRACT

The undergraduate special education teacher training program at the University of South Alabama is described. The program emphasizes practica placements in public schools and agencies serving exceptional children and youth. Practicum at the freshman level consists primarily of observation, with each year providing greater exposure. Student teaching/internship involves a full 10-week quarter in the senior year. The roles of the college supervisor and the cooperating teacher are reviewed along with the evaluation system used. (CL)

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Special Education Practica

and

Internship Experiences

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Special Education Practica and Internship Experiences

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The Department of Special Education of the University of South Alabama has an undergraduate interrelated (MR/COHI) program containing extensive practica throughout the four-year program. Coursework and practica experiences begin in the freshman year and increase proportionately through the senior year. This gradual progression of practica experience along with coursework assists with the role transition from college student to professional teacher.

Freshmen take a three-quarter sequence consisting of a survey of special education. In addition to campus lectures, a four-hour lab each week is involved. Lab sessions include observations of exceptional children in public school classes and agencies. The exceptional children observed in labs are those currently being discussed in the campus classes. Course content for the freshman sequence is divided as follows:

- 101 includes an overview of the field of special education including current issues and trends (mainstreaming, PL 94-142, deinstitutionalization), as well as the exceptionality areas of mental retardation, crippling conditions and other health impaired and severely/profound handicapped.
- 102 covers the areas of gifted child education, learning disabilities and emotional disturbance.
- 103 includes speech problems, vision and hearing impairments.

Competency areas for the freshman sequence include (1) definitions, classification, prevalence, etiology and symptomatology of exceptional children (2) characteristics of children/youth in all areas of exceptionality areas (3) local services available for exceptionality areas (4) social/emotional and other problems encountered by exceptional children and their families, and (5) learning and behavioral characteristics of exceptional children/youth. Practicum at the freshman level consists primarily of observation. Lab reports are completed by students weekly describing the agency/facility/school visited, the children and teacher observed, activities in progress and any questions which arise.

The primary purposes of the freshman sequence are to give students an orientation to all exceptionalities (learning disabilities, hearing impaired, etc.) and to allow them to observe handicapped and gifted children/youth and the services provided for those children/youth. The Department of Special Education believes that these early experiences of observation are extremely important and valuable for our students. Before these courses and labs were provided in our program, many students selected a major in special education and were not quite sure of their career choice. When student teaching occurred in the senior year, some found that they were unable to cope with the children and/or the demands of teaching. By providing early exposure to exceptional children/youth, college students are much better prepared for the field of special education and have more information at their disposal to determine if this is the career they want.

The sophomore courses require the student to spend four hours per week working as an aide in the practicum setting and carrying one quarter hour of credit. SPE 200 Field Experiences in Special Education is taken each quarter of the sophomore year and practicum placements are assigned on the basis of a student's needs and interests. Activities which the student may perform in the practica include preparation of bulletin boards, preparation and grading of pupil assignments, working with small groups under the cooperating teacher's supervision, working one-to-one with a particular child, setting up and operating various educational media equipment (filmstrip, overhead and 16 mm projectors, tape recorders, etc.) and other assigned tasks.

As soon as a sophomore student has completed his/her schedule of classes for the quarter with the advisor, the student fills out the practicum placement request form. (TRANSPARENCY 1) Assignments are then made for students in schools and agencies. Usually sophomores are provided three different experiences in the three quarters that they take sophomore field experiences. For example, a sophomore student may be placed in an elementary EMR class in the Fall, a high school EMR class in Winter Quarter,

etc. or the student may spend Fall Quarter at Brewer (a residential facility), Winter Quarter at Mobile Association for Retarded Citizens (M.A.R.C.) and Spring Quarter at Augusta Evans School (a special day school serving TMRs).

During these sophomore placements, students turn in weekly reports and assignments to their college instructor. Students are evaluated at mid-term and at the end of the quarter by their cooperating teacher/supervisor from the school or agency where they are placed. These evaluations are usually checklists so that the cooperating teachers are not bogged down with complicated paperwork. Comment space is provided on this form and welcomed by the Department of Special Education since the information may be especially useful for the student's advisor in counseling with the student.

Junior level students take a three-quarter bloc of coursework with 8 clock hours per week of practicum. Courses in the junior bloc are primarily concerned with methods and materials. Learning activities associated with competencies for junior coursework involves (1) assessment of functioning levels of children/youth for the content areas of curriculum, (2) determination of appropriate curricular goals and content, (3) planning, designing and implementing of instruction keyed to goals and objectives, (4) developing a prescriptive teaching program (5) recording and evaluation of pupil progress, (6) using classroom management techniques, (7) identifying and assessing learning and behavioral problems, (8) organizing the classroom for management of physical problems of children, (9) selecting, modifying and developing of teaching materials, (10) using behavioral modification techniques to increase and maintain positive behavior and eliminate negative behavior.

The 8-hour practicum placement allows students to expand on the previous sophomore experiences. Attention is given to incorporating the learning activities enumerated above into the practicum situation. Students are given assignements to complete in the classroom under the cooperating teacher's supervision. Examples of these include designing a behavior modification project, administering and scoring

an assessment instrument, designing lesson plans to implement curriculum goals, and recording pupil progress. Evaluation forms on students are distributed to the cooperating teachers at mid-term and at the end of the quarter. However, the contact of the cooperating teachers with the college supervisor is usually more frequent and accomplished over the phone. Junior students assume more responsibility in the practicum situation and participate more in instructional activities than sophomores.

Student teaching/internship involves a full 10-week quarter in the practicum situation. Since students have progressed through 240-clock hours of prior observation and participation in practicum, they have a foundation of experiences on which to build the student teaching/internship. The intern is expected to demonstrate competencies developed in earlier courses and practica during this quarter.

Successful internship or student teaching is a shared responsibility of the intern, the cooperating teacher and the college supervisor. Initial responsibilities of the cooperating teacher include preparing the class for the intern's arrival by explaining the advantages of a second teacher, studying the intern's Personal Data Form, planning a conference with the intern on his/her initial reporting day, and informing the intern of local policies and regulations, such as reporting accidents, securing first aid, using the library, audio-visual materials and duplicating equipment.

The intern should be provided with copies of textbooks and other materials to be used in the class. Discussion of long-range and immediate objectives for the class and for group activities should be shared. The intern should assume responsibility for the planning and conducting of one class or one group, or one period, initially, and then add additional periods or classes as he or she gains confidence and experience. To select this class, or subject, very soon is wise so the intern may begin immediately to develop his or her plans. With the extensive program of experiences to which the intern has been exposed, almost all interns are ready to assume the responsibility for conducting one class no later than the end of several

days of internship. The cooperating teacher should discuss techniques, sequence, and evaluation of the lesson plan with the intern before it is presented to the class and then follow-up after the lesson with a critique and suggestions for improvement.

The cooperating teacher should arrange for the intern to briefly observe other teachers in the school in his teaching area. It is more beneficial for the intern to observe a single teacher working with the same class several consecutive periods than observing several different teachers for a single class period or lesson.

At least one organized conference per week between the cooperating teacher and intern should be arranged. Early in the quarter more frequent conferences may be necessary. The intern should prepare written lesson plans for the cooperating teacher to review and make suggestions. The cooperating teacher should offer specific suggestions for improving the planning, organization, implementation and teaching of the intern.

To assist the intern in gaining confidence and independence as a teacher, the cooperating teacher can avoid interrupting or interferring with the intern while he or she is teaching. Corrections, suggestions, praise, and disapproval should be reserved for conferences between the intern and the cooperating teacher. The intern should be encouraged to do full-time teaching as much as possible depending on his/her readiness and progress. Before the end of the assigned practicum the intern should have the experience of teaching a full load for a minimum of two weeks.

The cooperating teacher should provide guidance for the intern in the area of co-curricular and extra-class activities. Interns are expected to assume the same responsibility that the cooperating teacher assumes in regard to these activities. Examples of extra-class activities include bus duty, study hall, in-service education meetings, hall duty, IEP meetings, parent conferences, school PTA meetings. The cooperating teacher may be involved in such co-curricular activities as school assemblies, socials and school newspapers. The intern should be involved in these

to the same extent as the cooperating teacher but should not be expected to assume additional responsibilities in excess of the cooperating teachers' responsibilities.

The college supervisor is the link between the College of Education and the practicum assignment for the student teacher/intern. His/her responsibilities as such include making pertinent information available to the cooperating teacher about the intern and his/her strengths and weaknesses. The college supervisor assists the cooperating teacher with planning the student teaching quarter and with the timing and degree of responsibility to be assigned to the intern. Goals, objectives and expectations of interns are explained to the cooperating teacher, principal, student intern and other professionals in the practicum situation.

An additional responsibility of the college supervisor is to plan and conduct the student teaching/internship seminar. The primary purpose of the seminar is to increase the intern's understanding of the responsibilities, duties and roles of a teacher. Since several interns meet with the college supervisor for seminars, there is an opportunity to share problems and discuss possible solutions. During the quarter the interns are provided with information and procedures concerning applying for a teaching certificate, completing teacher placement papers, applying for NTE or other examinations, and interviewing with a school system for a job.

The college supervisor acts as a resource person for the cooperating teacher in regard to any questions/problems which arise. Evaluation of the intern is always a concern of the cooperating teacher and the college supervisor assists with this process by providing appropriate information concerning the particular student's background and training. Since the college supervisor has responsibility for several interns in different practicum placements, he/she is usually able to give a more objective assessment of the student's abilities.

The evaluation form is completed at mid-term and at the end of the quarter of internship. Transparency 2 (a, b, c) It is designed to assess the growth and progress of the student. In the past, cooperating teachers have often found it helpful to allow an intern

to complete one on himself while the cooperating teacher completes hers and to compare and discuss these. In this way strengths and weaknesses are identified and suggestions for improving the intern's performance can be made. Cooperating teachers are urged to make appropriate comments and to provide specific examples of both positive and negative behaviors on the part of the intern. Without such open communication among the cooperating teacher, college supervisor and intern it is unlikely that real improvement can be demonstrated.

During the quarter following the student teaching/internship experience, students in special education take SPE 498 Senior Seminar in Special Education. This course is designed to allow students to fill in any gaps in their training which may have been identified during the internship. Students take a departmental competency examination and use the results of their performance on it as well as the evaluation report of intern progress to develop and IEP for themselves. Progress on the IEPs is checked by the faculty member during individual conferences with students.

The seminar sessions include a sharing of techniques/activities with each student demonstrating one activity each week and providing a written description of it for all of the seminar students. These provide the student with a resource booklet by the end of the quarter. Former students have indicated that these booklets are extremely useful to them during their first year of teaching. Usually one seminar session is devoted to examination of commercially available materials for special education pupils. Since funds for classroom materials are limited, special education teachers must be on the alert to select materials that will be appropriate for their particular classroom needs. Local teachers are invited to a seminar session and provide interns with a show-and-tell critique of commercial materials they have used and found to be effective or ineffective in their classroom.

Evaluation of and by the students during the undergraduate program is an essential element. Transparency 3 As previously mentioned, freshmen students complete weekly observation reports which identify the particular lab, age of pupils, exceptionality area, description of the physical facilities, description of teacher and pupil activities in progress during the observation and provide comments and/or questions of the observation lab. These early laboratory experiences allow students to correct any misconceptions and stereotyped ideas they may have of exceptional children.

Sophomore students who function as aides are formally evaluated by the cooperating teachers twice each quarter. Transparency 4 Students complete a weekly report and a weekly assignment for the college instructor. Transparencies 5a, b The practicum time activities log provides an analysis of how time is spent by the student in the placement. This ensures that the students are provided with a variety of activities during the quarter.

At the junior level the students again complete the weekly practicum activities log. Transparency 6 The evaluation form for the student is completed at mid-term and the end of the quarter by the cooperating teacher. Teachers in the practicum settings are urged to make comments concerning the student's performance, particularly noting areas of strengths and weaknesses. The student's advisor then schedules a conference for sharing this information. In this manner, students are able to take an active role in changing behaviors and filling in gaps in their practicum performance.

During the internship quarter the conference time scheduled for the cooperating teacher and intern is used for evaluation of lessons presented, planning and implementing of additional lessons to be presented, discussion of techniques and methods used, assessment of pupil progress and recording of results. The college supervisor uses information provided by the cooperating teachers concerning these conferences

to plan in-depth seminars for all of the interns. Most interns experience anxiety concerning classroom control and behavior management techniques even though as junior level students they have had coursework in this area. At least one of the seminar sessions is concerned with this topic. Other topics are determined by intern needs. The open communication of the intern, cooperating teacher and college supervisor is essential to the program's effectiveness.

Students provide feedback from the various practica settings using the Record Transparency 7a-b
of Practicum Experiences. This form allows students to comment on the most beneficial and least useful aspects of the placement as well as providing for student preference for future sophomore and junior practica. This information provided by students using this form assists the university faculty in working with cooperating teachers to improve the quality of practicum placements for future students.

Transparency 8a-b
Student evaluation of internship allows students to rate the areas of skill development, adequacy of coursework and communication and feedback in relation to the student teaching experience. This form is used by masters level students as well as seniors in the undergraduate program. It is more detailed than the sophmore/junior record of practicum experience because of the additional time spent in the practicum setting and students are expected to demonstrate higher level competencies in the senior practicum.

The Department of Special Education adopted a policy of student evaluation of faculty teaching in the Fall of 1976. Each faculty member must have at least one course of the usual 3 course load evaluated by students. These forms are usually distributed at the last class meeting before final exams. To ensure confidentiality, faculty members are not present as students complete the forms, responses are placed in a sealed envelope, delivered to the department secretary and held until final grades have been completed. Responses are then tallied and shared with the faculty member by the Departmental Chairperson. The results of this evaluation have proved

to be extremely useful to the faculty in improving classroom teaching.

For the Spring, Summer and Fall 1979 Quarter the following results are reported. Transparency 9
The data is based on 28 courses taught by 9 faculty members. Clearly stating course goals and clearly defining responsibilities in the course were areas where the faculty performed best. This is probably due to the departmental policy adopted 3 years ago concerning course outlines. Within the first week of classes and usally at the first class meeting the instructor provides each student with a course outline which includes goals and objectives of the course, assignments and their due dates, and a description of how students will be evaluated and grades assigned.

Interest in students and their problems and providing personal help ranked 3 and 4 for the faculty while adapting coursework to the student's level and knowledge of the subject were the 5th and 6th ranked items. Encouraging original and creative thought by students, efficient use of time and fairness of grading policies followed in rank order. On all of these items, faculty members were rated 1.99 or less indicating superior or above average performance.

Using the scale of 1 to 5, (1 being high, 5 low) the lowest rating obtained by faculty was 2.23. This figure is above average - in fact, the faculty was rated above average on all 13 items.

Although evaluation of students by faculty and vice versa are important factors in the training program, the essential elements are the practica placements and the activities of the students there. Transparency 10 a & b The Mobile area provides a variety of settings available for student training. These are indicated in the following tables. In addition to the agencies, the Mobile County School System (the largest in the State of Alabama) has a total of 84 schools. This includes elementary, middle and high school level and urban, suburban and rural settings.

Students are thus provided with a variety of practica experiences and are exposed to a range of possible future teaching situations. Although students may complain concerning a particular quarter's placement, in general when they reach the senior

seminar they indicate they appreciate the variety of experiences and feel that they are better prepared as a result.

This was recently emphasized in a junior level class that is offered this quarter. The instructor mentioned that the State Department has adopted new standards for teacher education programs and that as a result freshman courses would be restructured and practicum might be reduced or eliminated entirely. Swift response from the students indicated that they felt that these early experiences were valuable and should be maintained. The reaction of students in the speech therapy program (who only have 5 placements and 6 courses within the Special Education Deaprtment) was emphatic in support of maintaining the freshman observation labs. All of these junior level students expressed their feelings that the freshman experiences were beneficial, especially since many of these students were undecided about a major when they entered college.

The Department of Special Education developed a slide-tape presentation for use in recruiting students and also to provide beginning students with an overview of the programs, faculty and activities of the department. The University of South Alabama sponsors several "Get Acquainted Days" usually on Saturdays for prospective students and their parents who visit the campus. The slides are utilized at those times and on Career Days in high schools. Since these show students in practica situations and since any department could develop a similar one, the slides are briefly presented.

SLIDES

To summarize, the Department of Special Education has developed an undergraduate training program using extensive practica placements in public schools and agencies serving exceptional children and youth. These experiences build from the freshman year of observations to the senior year of full student teaching responsibility. This gradual sequence and progression of practica experience assists undergraduate in the role transition from student to professional teacher.

List of Transparencies

Page 2	1.	Practicum Information/Request Form.
Page 6	2.	(a.b.c) Report of Internship/Practicum Progress.
Page 8	3.	Lab Report: SPE 102 Intro. to Special Education.
Page 8	4.	Sophomore Field Experience Student Evaluation.
Page 8	5.	(a,b) Practicum Activities Time Log.
Page 8	6.	Professional Sequence (Junior) Practicum Evaluation.
Page 9	7.	(a,b) Record of Practicum Experiences.
Page 9	8.	(a,b) Student Evaluation of Internship.
Page 10	9.	Student Evaluation of Faculty Teaching.
Page 10	10.	(a,b) Undergraduate Practicum Placement Sites.
	11.	Typical Course Sequence.